

Sunday Aug. 13 - 1954

Public Forum

The ADVERTISER will publish all non-libelous letters from readers expressing their views for the Public Forum. Letters MUST be signed, but name of writer will be withheld from print upon request. The views expressed may reflect any side of an issue, but are not necessarily the opinions of the ADVERTISER.

Tempting the Negro Vote

August 13, 1954.

Dear Editor:

I have lived all of my 76 years in Lafayette, striving at all times to be a good Christian and citizen and to warrant the respect and confidence of the people I know of both races.

I have seen Lafayette grow from a small hamlet to a city of great promise and hope. I have seen the increased advantages to my race, economically and politically, finally culminating in the exercise of that precious American privilege — the right to vote — the foundation of our Democracy. Yet, I saw things happening during the First Primary election on July 27th, 1954, which filled me with apprehension and disappointment — apprehension because of the weakness of some of my people — and disappointment in the conduct of some white people in contributing to the degradation of the weak and easily influenced of my race in the exercise of their vote.

I live on South Washington Street. Within the block are located three Negro Saloons (all operated by white people). This area is a hang-out for large numbers of saloon frequenters.

On the occasion of this election I saw what seemed to be a well planned and organized effort to "handle" the weak Negro voter of my neighborhood.

The saloon across the street from my home, being also a combination grocery store, was the headquarters for the operation. A high ranking member of the City Police Department (under Civil Service) was there all day with three other white men "hustling" the Negro voter. The prospective Negro voter would be guided into the saloon building and emerged a short time later, directed to a waiting automobile, usually driven by this Police Officer, and was then brought to the polls. This went on all day. How many were taken in this fashion is difficult to say, but there were many. The whole operation was quite "smelly".

I saw also the superior of this Police Officer, (also under Civil Service) periodically make the rounds and stop and converse with the police officer in question. He must have known what was going on.

I know most of the people of my race now cherish their right to vote, and seek to exercise this great privilege conscientiously, and to vote for the best qualified man — yet, others are weak and easily tempted. I appeal to the politician and others not to tempt the weak of my race and make us unworthy of this great American trust.

Thanking you, I am

Very respectfully,
A voter

Wed. Aug. 18-1954

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Police in Elections?

Lafayette, La.
Aug. 16, 1954

Public Forum
Daily Advertiser
Dear Sir:

I had heard of it before, but I couldn't bring myself about to believe that in our wonderful little city we had police interference with the free exercise of our great privilege to vote. I never thought that the city fathers of Lafayette would permit police participation in elections. But that brave colored man told the story in his letter to the public forum this past Sunday. I guess by now he is either in jail or has been threatened.

Hitler used his police to interfere in his elections, until finally the privilege to vote under Hitler's regime was no longer a right of citizenship. Stalin used his police to interfere in his elections, too, and now an election in a communistic state is a big joke. Peron of Argentina has kept himself in power by using his police force on election day. Has Lafayette reached that point! Are we in Lafayette living in a police controlled community? Since when is it the business of the police to tell a citizen

how to vote? They are under civil service. It is against the civil service laws for a police officer to take part in politics. If the police and their superiors are going to violate the laws to elect candidates of their choice, a citizen can certainly assume that these officials and their candidates have no good faith intention to either administer or abide by the law as public officials. They, therefore, violate the public trust before they assume it.

What the police officers have done was undoubtedly done with the full knowledge of their superiors, because the police headquarters should know where each officer is at any given moment of the day. If their whereabouts should be unknown, then we have no efficient police department. It is obvious that the citizenry of Lafayette cannot look to the police department of Lafayette to enforce the laws against police interference in elections. We the people will have to act. Let's form a Voter's Vigilante! On election day, let's each have a camera and take pictures of the activities of the police, and after the election turn in this information to the District Attorney's office for prosecution. In this way, nothing resembling Hitlerism will ever get a foothold on the community of Lafayette.

I desire to withhold my name. If the police is capable of interfering with a citizen's privilege to vote, there is no telling what else they are capable of doing. I guess they will call the Advertiser for my name, but I am willing to take that chance.

Yours Sincerely,
S- A DISTRESSED VOTER